ERIC Document Resume	See Instruction Sheet	DATE OF RESUME 7/3/65	DATE RECEIVED

A. PUBLICATION DATA

1. ERIC NUMBER	2. ORIGINATOR CONTROL NO(S).	3. IDENTIFICATION NO.	DO NOT WRITE IN SPACE BELOW
ED000868	8418		

4. AUTHOR(S):
Haswell, Harold A.

5. TITLE OF DOCUMENT ABSTRACTED:
Developments in Curricula of Liberal Arts Colleges

6. PUBLICATION TITLE:
Factors in the Long Look for Lutheran Higher Education

7. EDITOR(S):
N.A.

8. PLACE OF ORIGIN
Nat'l. Lutheran Edu. Conference
ORG.
2633 16th St., NW
Washington, DC 20009
CITY, STATE

9. PUBLISHER OR SOURCE
National Lutheran Education Conference

10. VOL.	11. PAGES	12. MO./YR.	13. TOTAL PP.
N.A.	45-52	63	8

TELE. EXT.
INST/LOC CODE

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TYPE OF REPORT
PROPOSAL ☐
IN-PROGRESS ☐
FINAL ☒
FOLLOW-UP ☐

OTHER ERIC REFERENCES:

ERIC SATELLITE CODE

B. INDEXING DATA

14. SUBJECT AREA

15. TYPE OF ENDEAVOR
report

16. INDEXING TERMS (6-12)

curriculum R-53	general edu. S-00			
liberal arts O-05	specialization Y-11			
undergraduate edu. Y-33	acceleration R-03	independent study S-14		

17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS)

In discussing curricular trends in liberal arts colleges, the author briefly cites several examples of recent curricular reforms. He characterizes these trends as moving toward a combination of a more carefully planned undergraduate program; a deepening of the content of general education, combined with a more direct transition to specialized study; an attempt to permit at least some students to speed up or intensify their efforts; and greater insistence on independent work.

ERIC No.

18. SOURCE OF ABSTRACT

C. FUNDING DATA

19. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION	20. DIVISION OR DEPT.	21. CONTRACT NO. / PROJECT NO.
	22. TOTAL COST OF PROJECT	
	23. DURATION OF PROJECT	U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Office of Education

ERIC Form 1

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE
Office of Education

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ED000868

DEVELOPMENTS IN CURRICULA OF LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

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Introduction

In recent years there has developed an imposing literature on the subject of quality or excellence in the liberal arts college. There has also been a growing sentiment focusing upon the need for fundamental reforms in higher education, and liberal arts colleges have taken the lead in such reforms. Many brave words have been written about casting aside tradition and attempting the development of new and experimental programs. In spite of all that has been said and written, however, truly significant academic reforms have touched a relatively small proportion of total enrollment. However, an examination of the literature leads one to conclude that the awareness of needed reform is stronger now than in the past, and that the circumstances of the times are conducive to change.

At the same time, the sheer force of numbers and economic necessity has caused many institutions to restudy their instructional methods, course content, and scheduling in order to make better use of faculty and facilities, to extend classes throughout a longer day, and to avoid unnecessary duplication in curriculum requirements. For example, the recognition that our technology is advancing so rapidly that we must provide basic education to cope with work that does not yet exist and cannot be clearly defined is forcing a new look at the objectives of education and the factors involved in achieving them. Indeed, whereas some college faculties in the past have been characterized by enormous powers of resistance to change, faculties of the future are expected to envisage change as an accepted way of life and to help students prepare for it.

The prime characteristic of our era is the rapidity at which conditions change, and the ever accelerating tempo of such change. These emerging world conditions demand new types of educational responses. One may properly inquire: Is it possible for the educational community to design a truly world-oriented type of liberal arts college which will be quickly responsive to changing conditions and current problems? How far will the "new liberal arts college" go in the direction of a new and more functional type of curriculum, reduction of course offerings, year-round education, credit by examination, programed learning, independent study, and honors programs? To what extent are such reforms related to improved instructional efficiency? This paper will not attempt to answer all of these questions but

will be directed toward basic changes which affect developments in curricula.

Let us first attempt to examine some of the dynamics or motivating forces of curricular change. Secondly, let us consider some of the economics underlying instructional planning. And finally, we shall look more closely at specific proposals for curricular reform.

Forces Motivating Curricular Change

Compared to the over-all planning and implementation of curricular reform, actual forces which effect curricular change are relatively simple and easy to identify. Curricular reforms should rest upon past experiences, anticipated needs, research, experimentation, demonstration, and evaluation. The motivating forces which effect these changes are the faculty, the administration, the board of trustees, and to some extent the students themselves. Earl McGrath in his *Memo to a College Faculty Member* states that "faculties not only have the right but the responsibility to undertake critical and continuing reviews of institutional offerings and to maintain an educational program consistent with the purposes of a liberal arts college."[1]

Faculty members have a substantial stake in curricular reforms, but they are likely to retain their rights and responsibilities with regard to shaping the curriculum only as they willingly and objectively bring the offerings within defensible bounds in terms of economic management of the curriculum and efficient use of staff time. To the extent they succeed in doing this, they may be acting in part out of self-interest, because their own economic well-being is determined by the strength of the total instructional program and this includes cutting away courses which are not needed. The consequences of such faculty efforts may very well determine whether the liberal arts college as such can survive in the entire enterprise of American higher education. This is a mission worthy of the dedication and effort of every faculty member.

Because of his over-all responsibility for institutional well-being, the college president is undoubtedly in a position to see most clearly the necessity for appropriate curriculum review and revision. At the same time, both tradition and good practice require that the members of the faculty take primary responsibility for planning and implementing actual alterations of the curriculum. However, unless the president exercises his proper initiative in moving toward such goals, the educational program of his institution may be shaped largely by subject-matter pressures and intrenched departmental powers.

In connection with curriculum review, it must be pointed out also that the responsibility of the board of trustees is no longer restricted to budgets,

[1] Earl J. McGrath, *Memo to a College Faculty Member*, published for the Institute of Higher Education by the Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York City, 1961. p. 4.

buildings, and fund-raising. Trustees may be particularly valuable in interpreting the present needs of society and peering into future needs. Actually, trustees, presidents and faculties should collaborate closely in the ongoing processes of evaluating and reshaping educational programs, the re-examination of old practices and experimentation with new ones in a concerted effort to improve the learning of students and the effectiveness of teachers. However, although the board may provide incentives for action and checks old balances for evaluation, there should be heavy reliance upon the research and study of the faculty and the counsel and recommendations of the president.

Finally, we must not overlook the impact of the students themselves as their needs affect and effect curricular changes. J. Kenneth Little, in his report on "Trends Affecting Contemporary Educational Planning," notes that "Colleges and universities, on the average, now attract, and will continue to attact, student bodies of considerably higher than average ability and achievement as compared with all persons of similar age."[2] Still, compared to their predecessors, the college student population today reflects wider diversification of ability, achievement, and interests. This is in keeping with society's demands, which are infinitely more complex than those of the past.

In the over-all picture, then, growth is the major factor or motivating force which affects educational planning by faculty, administration, and trustees. There are more persons to be educated, more things to learn about, and more ideas to stretch the horizons of human understanding. The rapidity of growth or change in each of these directions has spelled an urgency which pervades every facet of the educational system. As one educator has said, with reference to the pressure of increasing demands for college education, "What may have appeared to be higher education's crises may yet turn out to be its best opportunity."[3]

Economics Underlying Instructional Planning

In considering the economics underlying instructional planning, we must remember that curricular reform should be gradual and continuous. The desired transition can be achieved by gradual changes in enrollments, by selecting students more discriminately in terms of institutional objectives, by continuous study of course offerings and persistent implementation of needed revisions, and by careful selection of new faculty members. None of these desirable steps is likely to be taken without a redefinition of purposes and a planned adjustment of departmental offerings to coincide with revised objectives.

Faculties and administrators alike will want to keep informed about

[2] *Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. XXXII, No. 4, April 1961, p. 196.
[3] Samuel Baskin, *Quest for Quality*, Number 7 of New Dimensions Series. U. S. Office of Education, 1960. Washington, D. C. p. 18.

research and apply the findings to their own institutions. As a basis for action, however, perhaps nothing can be more revealing to an institution than the results of its own self-surveys of class size, teaching loads, departmental offerings, and other pertinent matters relating to general instructional cost.

If faculties are to be expected to approach the task of curricular reform objectively and in an altruistic spirit, they should have assurance from the administration and trustees that they will share in the fruits of their labor. Every course in the curriculum should be weighed in the balance of relevance to undergraduate education to prevent over-expansion of the curriculum and achieve maximum efficiency. Economies resulting from their efforts to design a minimal program for their respective departments should revert to the instructional budget and eventually be reflected in higher salaries and improved teaching conditions.

If institutional morale is not to suffer during the period of major curricular readjustment, faculty members must understand clearly the close relationship between the diversity of instruction they offer and class size, on the one hand, and the general economic condition of the institution they serve and their own salaries, on the other. Many studies reflect these relationships. For example, in his *Memo to a College Faculty Member,* mentioned earlier, McGrath says: "The facts produced by this inquiry and substantiated in others with regard to the high cost of small classes and their relationship to salaries indicate that . . . faculties have a large stake in plans for making the institutions . . . operate at maximum financial efficiency,"[4]

The same conclusions are to be drawn from data from more than 60 small degree-granting liberal arts colleges in the North Central region, as shown in a 1962 report of Educational Facilities Laboratories, *To Build or Not to Build.*[5] Table after table in that report show that utilization of staff and facilities tend to be better for the larger institutions, that small colleges may be trying to encompass more curricular variation than is financially workable for them, that the offering of fewer and better courses may be an important factor in raising faculty salaries and achieving greater over-all efficiency.

Seymour Harris states emphatically that "faculty pay would be much higher if faculties were more disposed to economize."[6] and that such effort will not seriously affect the educational product. He cites as proof of this

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[4] Op. cit., p. 5. McGrath cites Floyd W. Reeves, Nelson B. Henry, and John Dale Russell, *Class Size and University Costs.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1933, p. 84; and Committee on Conduct of the Study of Higher Education in California. *A Restudy of the Needs of California in Higher Education,* Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1955, p. 447.

[5] Educational Facilities Laboratories. *To Build or Not To Build*: A Report on the Utilization and Planning of Instructional Facilities in Small Colleges, based on research by John X. Jamrich, Michigan State University. Educational Facilities Laboratories, 477 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y., 1962, 38 pp.

[6] Seymour E. Harris, "I. Introduction: Some Broad Issues," in *Higher Education in the United States,* Edited by Seymour E. Harris, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1960, p. 18.

contention the experience of President Hutchins at Chicago during the depression years when the faculty voluntarily dropped 450 courses from the curriculum when Hutchins announced that the objective was to maintain faculty pay.

The evidence is abundant that the future existence and stature of independent liberal arts colleges will depend largely upon their ability to use their limited resources more effectively than they presently do. Simple mathematics enable us to see the obvious relationship between course proliferation and class size. With any given enrollment, it stands to reason that the more courses an institution schedules the smaller will be the size of individual classes. Liberal arts colleges which tend to offer a considerable variety of instruction as a rule have a low average class size and consequently fewer larger classes. The faculty-student ratio and the average class size are basic factors in determining instructional cost. No instruction striving to increase faculty salaries can afford to ignore the increased cost resulting from course proliferation. This conclusion is doubly compelling when reviewed in the light of current research on class size which seems to indicate that the burden of proof of the value of small classes rests on the protagonists. Most of the research seems to show no significant differences between the effectiveness of instruction in small and large classes. Winslow R. Hatch and Ann Bennet in *Effectiveness in Teaching*, No. 2 of New Dimensions in Higher Education Series, maintain that "Class size is not the critical variable in teaching effectiveness in higher education; but rather the quality of teaching (and learning)."[7] They cite 12 studies which substantiate this hypothesis.

If, however, a faculty concludes that small classes and individualized instruction have sufficient merit to justify the high cost, it is incumbent upon them to incorporate into their planning ways to offset such costs by means of additional charges to students, expansion of income from other sources, or development of offsetting economies. For example, organizing larger units where feasible in the instructional program can compensate for the increased expense of some personalized teaching and thereby contribute to greater over-all efficiency.

Numerous studies show also that the amount of time spent in class is no valid measure of the amount of learning accomplished by the student.[8] While honors, independent study, and other newer approaches to the teaching-learning process may not represent a saving in faculty time during their initial stages, there is ample evidence that students are capable of taking progressively greater responsibility for their own learning. With planning in the hands of superior and dedicated faculty, the flexibility which can be brought to the curriculum through these approaches can result not only in

[7] U. S. Office of Education, 1962, p. 3.
[8] Lanora G. Lewis, *The Credit System in Colleges and Universities*, No. 9 of the New Dimensions in Higher Education series, U. S. Office of Education, 1961, 38 pp.

improvement of the quality of offerings but also in better utilization of space and staff.[9]

Individual colleges differ widely in curricular patterns, and should continue to do so; however, many institutions could profit by paring down their present programs without loss, and in all probability with actual gains in academic quality and institutional effectiveness. A sound basic program, tailored to needs and abilities of individual students in terms of areas of study, can be infinitely more effective—and efficient—than a great variety of separate courses spread thinly over a hodgepodge of diverse majors. The necessity for raising faculty salaries and the urgent need to stretch limited resources make it imperative that independent liberal arts colleges exhaust every device which will contribute to efficient use of teaching resources.

Examples of Curricular Reforms

Finally, let us consider some of the more widely acclaimed curricular reforms. The new direction is toward a combination of a more carefully planned undergraduate program; a deepening of the content of general education, combined with a more direct transition to specialized study; an attempt to permit at least some students to speed up or intensify their efforts; and greater insistence on independent work. One may generalize by saying that the present trend is toward fewer courses and a higher curriculum with increased responsibility upon the learner. Programs of study tend to cover subject areas and inter-relationships of areas at the undergraduate level. Specialization and mastery of professional subject matter tend to be moved to the final year of the undergraduate program or reserved exclusively for graduate study.

Most of these trends have been apparent for more than a decade. In 1947 Amherst revised its curriculum and introduced a stiff required program for the first two years. The course of study included a special mathematics-physics course and a rigorous descriptive writing course, followed in the sophomore year by an all-college course in "Problems of American Democracy." About the same time Colgate introduced a core curriculum leading to a sequence of courses in "American Ideals and Institutions in Their World Settings."

More recently Ithaca College has announced a plan based on the assumption that elective offerings during a student's undergraduate years are often so scattered that he enters graduate school or life with insufficient preparation in both general education and basic knowledge in his major field.[10] The Ithaca faculty admittedly attributed some of these failings to "interdepartmental rivalries," which may lead, among other things, to the extrava-

[9] Winslow R. Hatch and Ann Bennett, *Independent Study*, No. 1, 1960, and Charles C. Cole and Lanora G. Lewis, *Flexibility in the Undergraduate Curriculum*, No. 10, 1962, of the New Dimensions in Higher Education series.

[10] *The Ithaca College Plan*, An Experiment in Modern Higher Education, Ithaca College, 1959, 28 pp.

gance of the same course being offered in two separate departments at the same time. The critics described as "window dressing" the use of introductory courses to attract students to specific departments. They concluded that the traditional curriculum was too expensive to justify its continued use and that too much valuable energy had been diverted to "an economic struggle for existence."

The new plan requires all students to choose a prescribed curriculum in one of the three special areas—science, social science, or the humanities. Each of the required curriculums covers a 3-year period and includes an enriched program of general education plus the mastery of the basic knowledge of the special area. The fourth year is devoted to a concentration in the special field of the student's interest.

The Ithaca Plan aims at goals which have become new targets for much of American higher education; that is, it hopes by intensified cohesive study during the first three years to offer senior courses at a higher-than-usual level. At the same time, by reducing the number of course offerings, it hopes to conserve faculty manpower, increase faculty salaries, and use teachers to a better advantage.

There are numerous reports by established institutions of experimentation with new instructional methods and new curriculum patterns designed to improve quality and extend the reach to increasing enrollments.[11] Among the newer institutions are some which are deliberately experimental, such as Monteith College of Wayne State University,[12] Raymond College of the University of the Pacific,[13] and the new university at Boca Raton.[14] Furthermore, the use of the honors approach with superior students has proved to be a fertile testing ground for teaching-learning practices appropriate for average students as well.[15]

In 1960 the University of Pittsburgh initiated a year-round educational program by putting itself on a new trimester calendar which is intended to enable students to accelerate undergraduate preparation and begin professional study as much as a year earlier. Other institutions have integrated summer offerings into year-round programs. As a result of their sensitivity to student needs, liberal arts colleges are in a position to capitalize on experiences reported by other institutions, to intensify the utilization of their facilities through year-round use, to extend the reach of their faculties

[11] Samuel Baskin, *Quest for Quality*, Some Models and Means, No. 7, of the New Dimensions in Higher Education Series, 1960, for comparisons of effectiveness of independent study and the more traditional methods and also for descriptions of some new curriculum patterns.

[12] *An Experimental College at Wayne State University*, Detroit, Wayne State University, 1958.

[13] *Creativity and Responsibility in Higher Education*, General Education and the Raymond Program, Stockton, Calif., Raymond College, University of the Pacific, Undated (1962?).

[14] *Report of the Planning Commission for a New University at Boca Raton*, Tallahassee, Florida, Board of Control, June, 1961.

[15] See the issues of *The Superior Student*, newsletter of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, published monthly during the school year since April 1958, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado.

through judicious combinations of programed learning, independent study, and formal instruction, and to provide for individual abilities and individual goals of students through curriculum patterns designed to provide flexibility, acceleration, and enrichment.

The liberal arts college is the oldest and most stable element in the complex American system of higher education. Such institutions have made a rich contribution to the intellectual, social, and economic development of our Nation. They owe their very existence to their ability to adjust and adapt themselves to the demands and circumstances of each changing generation. Without a doubt, the events of the immediate future will test the very foundations upon which these institutions rest. Spiraling instructional costs, competition for qualified faculty, and pressure to expand course offerings will present a combination of challenge and threat. Only those institutions will survive which deliberately and critically examine their instructional programs and wisely effect curricular changes which will not only insure more economical instructional costs but will at the same time undergird and guarantee institutional excellence.

I have faith to believe that the liberal arts colleges will not only survive the tests which confront them but in the end will emerge stronger institutions and will continue to enrich and influence American culture for another three hundred years.